



AUSTRALIAN FABIANS

Ageing in Victoria

Submission based on
suggestions by
Members and supporters
Of the Australian Fabian Society
(Victorian Branch)

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Preamble:

Around twenty four members and supporter of the Australian Fabian Society gathered for a consultative workshop using an electronic meeting system on Wednesday June 4 to make suggestions to the Ministerial Advisory Council of Senior Victorians as part of the Seniors Speak Up initiative.

None of the suggestions may be construed as in any way policy on the part of the Society but merely represent the suggestions gathered in the workshop on the part of individuals and simply have the strength of their individual contribution.

In order to gauge the type of individual involved, a warm up exercise identified the following list of traits or attributes the group gave to seniors: savouring the 'joie de vivre', creative and out of the square thinking, open-minded to knowledge and learning, having resilience, making the most of experience, employing imagination, having compassion, open to fun, being visionary, valuing wisdom, capable of being appreciated and recognised, with a focus on implementation, being perceptive, challenging and provocative, patient and tolerant but not stubborn, extolling hope in adversity, living in integrity and capable of living larger than life.

Max Dumais
Workshop facilitator

Ideas for making health care more accessible:

- Health is interlinked with housing. It should also be interlinked with an effective monitoring process for people that is accessible within their homes and where appropriate, within institutions. Seniors need checks and balances within their home and in the community.
- Need to have inter-connectedness within the health system and a crossover within the system to reduce isolation and to increase access. Also want connectedness, not compartmentalizing of the different aspects of health services.
- Once people are within the health system, there needs to be some thought given as to how to prevent illness even at this stage.
- If people do get institutionalized, then that person should expect to be in a supportive and humane environment.

- It is not appropriate for young people to be in institutions like dementia wards and the like so there needs to be an expansion of the facilities for these individuals.
- In regards to indigenous people, the gap in their life expectancy with the general population must be dealt with and a holistic and realistic policy put in place. This is not an academic exercise, but needs to be done in conjunction with the indigenous peoples themselves as a real part of the health system. The other way has not worked.
- Rural areas and outer suburbs must be linked into the ambulance and other health services in order to assist people. Isolation in the bush needs to be dealt with.
- The emphasis should be on universal coverage and community health instead of just the private sector. The emphasis should be at least equally on preventative measures as well as just treating acute situations. A genuine universal health scheme for people of all ages not just the elderly.
- Public dental health is of great importance for the elderly.
- A richer source of knowledge of what's available is important. Accessibility to health information for the public is essential in empowering the health consumer regarding their options.
- Electronic referral should be part of the health system
- Where ageing in place is promoted it should mean that services come to you. Some services should be home-based rather than external wherever possible.
- Good cheap transport - e.g. flexi-buses, taxi vouchers, spread the services to be located within walking distance where possible.
- Networks for support should be put in place, both voluntary and paid.
- Access to GPs is an issue – there needs to be more bulk billing through super clinics.
- Emphasis should be on prevention, with a social not just a medical model and an expansion of local community services.
- Move more people from hospitals into nursing homes, to free up hospital beds so that more elective procedures can be undertaken. Avoid public health beds taken up by private patients
- The name 'Nursing home' is a barrier to their acceptance perhaps they could be called 'Retirement Retreats', 'Senior Community Centres', or even, 'Sunset retreats'. Consider more appropriate language.

- Train up nurses (and pay them more) to take some of the workload from doctors - barefoot doctor model!
- Integrate preventative health services that are easily accessible and make mental health services more accessible.
- Concentration on preventative health through neighbourhood/community health centres.
- Better support for carers.
- Better funding of dental health and no waiting lists
- More programs that adequately cater to mental health.
- Foster the ability to remain active
- Make all health care accessible to all through cheaper and lower costs with services localised rather than centralised together with knowledge of what is available and how to contact those services.
- Ensure an adequate number of doctors and staff are available in each centre with more general practitioners and dentists being trained for each area as well as inclusive health centres in all areas.
- Extend the pharmaceutical benefits scheme.
- An expansion of enhanced primary care programs with home visits from a health worker and adequate personalised transport to health services.
- Increase the visibility of existing programs
- Referral to appropriate services from Health professionals.
- Improve public hospitals.
- Establish strategically placed community health centres with a meeting place for the elderly to access referral and assessment as well as preventative advice on diet and life style.

Priority suggestions:

1. Expanded local community services.
2. More home-based treatment and support.
3. Focus on prevention rather than cure.
4. Broader involvement of a range of health professionals.
5. More general practitioners and dentists.
6. Cheaper more flexible transport options.
7. Better use of technology at all levels.
8. Bulk billing and access to super clinics
9. Increase knowledge and visibility of services.
10. Address access to dental care for the elderly.

Getting information about community services and activities out to seniors more effectively:

- Educate children in what services are available for them to help their parents. For example have students locate facilities on behalf of their grandparents and make it a cross generational exercise in experiential learning.
- Use Centrelink offices and mail outs more in order to communicate with people.
- Better use of Community radio and the use of local media in more constructive ways.
- Have people training others to disperse information, although some people are overloaded with information already.
- Use the telephone to inform seniors of important information
- Organisations like the Taxi Card should be easier to get and they should provide the information more readily available.
- At sixty, the government should send out a package of information that is important to seniors, whether they are eligible for a Seniors Card or not.
- Make sure that the people that are sent out to assist older people are quality people, particularly in communicating with the elderly.
- Ensure internet access within aged care facilities with support for the elderly, generally, to use PCs more widely.
- Increase library funding to enable outreach activities to local seniors and link them into the Seniors Card initiative offering free services along the voucher systems available in public transport.
- Supply multi-government services at each state or federal government as well as at the local government office.
- Install Touch screens around shopping centres, etc.
- Make more use of key commercial outlets for community information (e.g. pharmacies)
- Maintain closer links with local government
- Train up volunteers - e.g. wheels on meals - so they can provide other assistance and act as gate-keepers on the needs of the elderly.

- Use TV programming - e.g. make seniors issues the theme of a drama/comedy. E.g a Mother and son type show where the offspring wrestle with the bureaucracy to gain assistance.
- Provide messages on gaming machine screens (popping up from time to time on the pokies!)
- Information on health services available as advice to be printed on pamphlets at GPs' and dentists' waiting rooms, in pharmacies and in community activity centres as well as by the postal service.
- Community centres should be a repository of information.
- Communities could have service providers which connect homes in the community. Use the active elderly themselves as an information resource – a friendly visitors program.
- Rationalize the various groups that see themselves as the holders of the information.
- Ensure that staff in local services, such as home carers, are informed and trained to make the services known.
- More assistance for senior citizens' centres to encourage local seniors to attend.
- Information to be published in local newspapers including ethnic newspapers and more use of radio.
- Highly visible information services using multi-media through media programs or media spots on seniors information services.
- Access to services through local council and community centres using Council newsletters
- Advertise to the elderly on commercial television.
- Disperse information through ethnic clubs with a mentoring scheme within each ethnic community e.g. through the priests and the mafia!
- Use politician's offices for community dispersal of information through ethnic radio and newspapers.

Themes:

- Skill up elderly to access the internet and email
- Cross sell messages through partners - doctors and chemists
- Use volunteers and service providers as community gate-keepers
- Co-locate services – use local government
- Specialised communication – ethnics and indigenous
- Use technology more
- Use mainstream media to advertise and program dramatised messages

Priority approaches:

1. Regular information in all media and online.
2. Wider promotion of senior information services.
3. Use commercial outlets - doctors and chemists and partnerships with industry.
4. More involvement of local government.
5. Imaginative use of technology and involving elderly.
6. Broader use of media - community radio etc.
7. Better library and community information funding.
8. Cross selling information in 'one stop shops'.
9. Training and support of volunteers as information brokers.
10. Creative use of drama to inform on issues.

Some of the key transport needs and how to address them:

- Piggy back excursions and social events on top of other activities such as gym club membership and council activities.
- Make public health payment systems integrated, easily accessible and even cheaper for seniors.
- Make public transport less of a hassle than driving yourself.
- Councils to support car sharing programs for the elderly off-peak for shopping and entertainment
- Create and promote an easy and useful trip planning facility on the internet that integrates bus, train, tram etc
- Cater for the toilet needs of people on the move!
- Provide a flexible delivery of transport services for health appointments.
- Getting library books - have a mobile local service that goes to people. This can also deal with the isolation issue.
- Maintaining transport for older people and ensuring their independence requires easier access to things like licenses and retaining their mobility. Make sure elderly don't just lose their licence on grounds of age alone - need an appeal system in place.
- Sunday outings are needed for people and the flexible delivery for these services means being picked up to go out on the weekend.
- Linking in transport services in private institutions like nursing homes to also take older people in the community who are not a formal part of the nursing home for outings.
- Problem of the cost of transport. One solution is sharing that transport.

- Improve public transport 24/7 which would create a booming economy.
- Expand free transport programs like the 7 am service and expand them to the weekend, for example, or other times as well as to the outer suburbs like Bacchus marsh.
- Need a flexible system to meet a multitude of needs - health, family, shopping, etc. Solution: a voucher system, a better public system, golf-cart style facilities, go-get car outlets, more bike facilities and car sharing.
- Need to get to a GP or outpatient service using taxi vouchers that are not considered to be a disadvantage on the part of the taxi driver
- Promote a more pedestrian and bike-friendly culture in Melbourne.
- Extend train and tram lines, including circumferential.
- Encourage and help older people to stop driving before it's too late. For instance, have an annual drivers' licence testing after the age of 85.
- Special exercise/gym access for the elderly to strengthen muscles and help pedestrian skills
- Design cars with easier access into them, e.g. swivel chairs, higher chairs
- Help meet the costs of greater access by helping to put the so-called elderly back into the work force.
- General accessibility and efficient public transport system that more effectively criss-crosses the state as well as metropolitan Melbourne.
- More seats at bus and tram stops and shelter from rain and wind at railway stations.
- Bus services in the evenings and at weekends especially in the outer suburbs and country services
- Recreational bus trips and shopping using Community minibuses that can be booked by telephone for short suburban trips.
- Taxis for disabled should not require 24 hours notice. It's impossible for a person with a disability to move around the CBD by Taxi under that condition.
- Promote walking groups for elderly within local councils.
- Make public transport reliable. The public transport system urgently needs to be upgraded.
- Reduce travel costs for seniors
- Have elderly car parks close to supermarket checkouts - as with present system for mothers and children and disability parking.

- Our suburbs need to be designed so that public transport can be readily built in from the outset.
- Public transport needs to be congenial, adequately staffed, with information readily available.
- Improve the design of the public transport system so that no person lives more than, say, 500 meters from a bus stop or from neighbourhood buses that service train stations, and integrate with train timetables. Alternatively, introduce a dial-a-bus option to connect with the system.
- All railway centres should be staffed. Manning at railway stations and on trams and buses to assist elderly and disabled people and maintain safety.
- Free transport at off-peak times for seniors. Free public transport would cost less than dealing with the pollution made by cars.
- Flexible and more user friendly community transport
- Expand designated bike paths – and ensure they remain separate from the roads.
- Review criteria for the half-price taxi program
- More non-threatening, drier refresher courses as run by some councils
- Transport needs to be safe and plentiful such as the use of community buses. We need a permanent, affordable but effective alternative to the private car.
- Devise a transport buddy system and bring back the policy of school children giving up their seats for the elderly.

Themes: enhance public transport - flexible, low cost and user friendly, address safety issues, consult before changing, more seating at stops, public toilets, design cities around public transport, separate carriages - bikes and public, staffing the stations trams, using the internet to better trip planning, piggy backing events, social connections, mobile services to households, community buses, engaging the elderly more after retirement, free transport off-peak.

Priority suggestions:

1. Upgrade public transport including access.
2. Ensure flexible services.
3. Integrate different modes of transport including their ticketing.
4. Higher density housing in urban design.
5. Safety issues e.g. staff at stations, lighting.
6. Extend free off peak and the use of Seniors cards interstate.

7. Introduce more 'Dial a bus' services.
8. Better taxis facility for disabled.
9. Carpooling and shared resources.
10. Make toilet facilities an integral part of the transport system.

Options for the housing and accommodation of seniors:

- Positive schemes for reverse mortgages that allow the elderly to live in their home and still have an adequate income. For example, the Singleton's model – the family home is sold to a company with 10% equity remaining with former owner, but freeing up the other 90% of the sale of the asset to be placed in an annuity to cover ongoing living costs with a tax charge on that annuity.
- More social mix planning so grand parents and children don't have to live in separate areas and more mixed use housing in cities with some floors in high rise building for living, some for shopping and some for commercial use.
- You need to maintain the mixture of older people and younger people together in suburbs, especially in older established ones, maybe through higher density policies and student housing options.
- Design and plan more student and elderly housing options
- Restore the handyman service for the elderly in local councils. One stop maintenance services for home owners including plumbers, carpenters etc.
- Introduce community service judgments by courts that require those convicted to undertake maintenance or gardening for the elderly.
- Organise young unemployed working bees for elderly in their homes under council supervision.
- More medium density solutions allowing the elderly to stay within their suburbs when selling up the family home.
- Require environmentally sustainable renovations, particularly in the context of medium density solutions.
- Introduce more active street life in the suburbs e.g. Street parties to meet your neighbours. Consider communal eating Italian style at common tables within restaurants.
- Make it easier for people to downsize their homes and encourage them through incentives.
- Shared accommodation for older people needs to be made easier. Encourage two or three generations to live in the one house in order to

maintain diversity and allow people to add to their house so that other generations can live there and remain part of their community.

- Reconfigure local areas so that people stay in their own homes longer through the more efficient use of large blocks in traditional areas. Build town houses for parents and grandparents on the existing house site to enable more affordable inner city living and the intergenerational use of housing stock.
- Expand the Wesley home share program, namely, where someone comes to live with you at a cheaper rent in return for certain assistance.
- Cluster housing and apartments, with access to a range of common services such as laundry and visitor entertaining facilities.
- Facilitate the exchange of homes for cheap holidays or family visits.
- Group housing surrounding a court yard area. Recreate village style living – for example, Spanish/Mexican style courtyard housing - people have own rooms facing a common space
- Let people buy the house only (not pay for land for 7 years)
- Return to our previous public housing policies to allow social mix and to include all ages intermingled throughout.
- Care services to be brought to people's homes rather than putting elderly people in institutions. Consider more state assistance with the installing disability aids (ramps, supports etc) in houses.
- Community homes for the elderly that are not just the last resort when you're ill and which have no one to look after you and housing programs that incorporate transition from independent living to care facilities.
- New homes need to take into account the needs of both the young and the elderly, including advice on safety in the home since that is where many injuries occur such as falling, slips etc.
- Provide assistance for people to live in their own homes and communities.
- Introduce more affordable rental housing with security of tenure
- More services to allow people to stay in their own homes e.g. Low cost home maintenance and gardening services and by increasing the utilities concessions for pensioners
- Expansion of the home share programs like Wesley runs and more supportive housing models e.g. Abbeyfield
- Give people the option to try out different forms of housing before making a final commitment

- Student type housing service along the same lines for the elderly e.g. community houses with separate bedrooms and shared facilities
- Community services to provide advice to the elderly to make their accommodation more suitable as they age
- Help with low interest and affordable loans to pay rates and for services
- Controlled rental agreements for the elderly, subject to a means test
- Encourage cooperative rental housing societies

Main Themes:

- Affordability
- Home share models
- Intergenerational housing
- Social mix in suburbs
- Housing equity solutions
- Public housing policy renewal
- Safety measures
- Maintenance and gardening assistance
- Sustainability and medium density housing stock
- Rental price control

Providing learning opportunities to assist older people wishing to work:

- Cross age tutoring in the workplace e.g. older workers trained on computers by younger workers (According to William Glasser, we learn 85% of what we teach and only 5% of what we hear!)
- Be aware of the needs of senior workers who are no longer capable of the heavy work that they have always done and provide options that are lighter and more suited to their current condition.
- Make part of any retirement package the offer of a re-training package
- Educate employers - Run employer education program on senior workers' skills. Get employers to value the skills of older workers. Employers need to assist an older worker to be up skilled so as to remain valuable to the company and to realise that older workers often have a level of patience that can be very valuable to companies.
- Change employer attitudes, especially by getting them to understand that experience is very valuable. Get employers to understand that you

could never have too much experience, especially if you are older. This is very valuable for both companies and organisations.

- Ongoing learning for younger workers to understand their older workers and to be more supportive of them.
- Seniors have to get a greater awareness of their self worth and not hide themselves away as they are very valuable.
- Older people should be free to change their jobs and be helped to do this to remain valuable to the organisation and the company and to themselves.
- Benchmark employers on their age diversity spread
- Identify which businesses can be started by older people themselves - and the assistance that can be provided to encourage entrepreneurship at this level.
- University of third age needs to get more profile in lifelong learning
- Make sure smaller employers get information on their obligations in relation to non-discriminatory practices.
- Introduce concessions at TAFE for older people to maintain their qualifications or to get new ones as well as in CAE courses, particularly in the arts.
- Provide training assistance to be mentors and use older people to work as grandparents for hire for child care.
- Educate media executives to the value of stories involving older people.
- Focus on the strengths of older people - 70 is no longer old.
- Prepare men in particular for retirement - show that this does not mean the end of work or life as they know it.
- People should not have to conceal their age when applying for a job when they over 45.
- Stop discrimination against older employees with regards to work cover and superannuation. Most volunteer insurance cover cuts out at 70 years - increase it to 90!
- Provide employers with incentives to employ older workers as we now do with apprentices
- Prepare government sponsored media ads showing older workers in prime work situations.
- Older workers are highly visible within volunteer work - perhaps there is a need to change some of this to paid work.

- Take the Scandinavian model of using workers between work and retirement to take on a mentoring/training role that becomes important in the workplace. Some US corporations provide senior staff, upon retirement, a year on no pay but with an office and continued use of their company car together with the resources of the company in order to undertake community endeavours based on tender and selection process within the company's corporate philanthropy policy.
- More accessible re-training programs for seniors. Provide assistance to update in science, technology and terminology in many areas where big changes have taken place. Introduce a form of specialised retraining in areas where science and technology have advanced rapidly.
- Develop on-line courses up to tertiary level at low cost.
- Some employers who advertise discount the experience of applicants simply on the basis of age. This is discriminatory in the extreme
- Create a data base to match skills of the elderly to inform potential employers

General comments:

- Equitable health care and access, especially for the retired on lower incomes, is not going to be supportable as we move towards the latest statistical peak of age distribution (one-third of the population aged by 2050, and then declining) unless taxes, particularly on income and property, are made progressive.
- As a group, aged people must communicate to younger people, that they are/or are willing to/ make the compromises that enable our economy to be an equitable funding model for all. Our juniors have the example of free university education from the mid 1970s and Medicare as it once was, to show what can be well meant yet fraught.
- The most economical way to cope with an ageing population is to ensure that the elderly can continue to be useful and independent until they drop. Keeping them full members of the community is also the most humane policy.
- Commercial design could make life easier, not harder
- Publishing could make life easier, not harder
- Computers could make life easier, not harder
- Public transport could make life easier, not harder
- Noise. Public places and broadcasting could make life easier, not harder
- Fashions for the elderly could make life more comfortable and beautiful.

- Commerce joins in the attack on oldies with product design with confusing signage, such as which way is On or Off. The new plasma screens with digital TV are made to look really sleek and fine by reducing the buttons almost to dots, with labels like tiny scratches. Press the wrong button to change the volume and the elderly may never find their station again, when the little hieroglyphics on a confusing array of remote controls cannot get them on to any channel lower than 256.
- Printers in the past designed fonts with great attention to legibility for fast reading – hence weighting and serifs, and black print on white paper. On lit-up electronic screens, on the other hand, the clearest fonts are unweighted sanserif, and on-screen text looks great with fancy backgrounds, including white on colours. Graphic designers use computers now, and thoughtlessly transfer unchanged what looks great on their screen on to print on paper – which is a different medium. For blocks of text, this means increasing difficulty for those with any degree of visual handicap, and disastrous blurring for many learners. A journal of remedial reading once put out an entire issue with white print on black paper. Did – could - anyone read it?
- The first computer and software designers took trouble to make everything on screen as legible and accessible as possible. They ensured clear print, borders to windows, and icons for commands both clear as pictographs and accompanied by clear text labels. I still use my outdated computer and Word program when I can, because my latest computer and software have toolbars which the non-nerd finds difficult, because the icons are small, smudgy, ambiguous and swiping them to get a text label is liable to result in something unexpected happening. I cannot clearly see or comprehend twenty-six of the icons on the toolbar as I type. But gee, they do look stylish, trendy and unobtrusive.
- Independence often needs continued driving a car or coping with public transport.
 1. On the roads the elderly are not the most accident-free. I think that one contributing factor could be found by research to be hassling pressure from other motorists to try to make them drive faster than they feel is safe for them, and being tooted for caution at roundabouts or drive amber lights, when they know their own reaction times are not split-second. I see accidents in parking lots when older people cannot see past large 4WDs, and are hooted at to take risks. Courtesy rather than rudeness to the older driver should be a sign of manhood. It will pay the taxpayer, since older people driven off the roads may be driven into care.
 2. Waiting for public transport is made harder for the elderly and frail by removing comfortable seats or replacing them with metal bars

of varying degrees of discomfort. This does not matter in the central business district with frequent trams and space constraints, but in outlying areas, waiting on convex cold metal in shelters designed to display ads rather than shelter from sun, rain or wind, is to be an object of pity to car-travellers as they whiz past. I was informed that decent seating on station concourses was not possible because druggies would sleep on them

3. The latest deed to discourage travel by the elderly on Victorian State public transport is to replace the large black-on-white station signs on railway platforms, with smaller signs of white on light-blue – at, no doubt, considerable cost. Travellers with any degree of visual handicap cannot easily decipher these smaller notices from an incoming train. At night in the dark even people with normal vision may locate the signs only by the larger white squares with numbers on that have been now tacked on to every sign to tell you that it is platform 1 or 2, at, no doubt, considerable cost. (Some people hoped the numbers told them about the pricing zones.) Many commuters know their stations without reading the signs. Others rely on the announcer on the train to tell them the next station; when, as can happen, the announcement is wrong, they are in trouble.
 4. The changes, made in the interests of today's hobgoblin of uniformity - which has even caused them to replace strongly-fixed upmarket-looking logos on lavatory doors, such as could be found in a good hotel, with proletarian-looking ones suitable for any doss-house, taking a workman half-an-hour per door, is hardly the way to unify the public transport system. The train operator claims that the changes are necessary for uniform colour-coding and all signage conforms with the Discrimination and Disability Act for the visually impaired. I am not so visually impaired that I cannot read a book a night, but when I tell an otherwise amiable young transport politician that I cannot read the new signs easily, he tells me flatly, "You are wrong." And I am told I am the only one to lodge a complaint. Yet as usual, 'many whinge though few speak up'.
- Noise. Many people find it hard to discriminate speech against background noise, and this problem increases with age as it becomes harder to hear the higher frequencies of voices.

Restaurants, as well as being awarded stars for quality, could have exclamation marks !!! for how much noise

- Public broadcasting, too, is also being made less accessible to the elderly. Broadcasting talks and announcements without noisy music backgrounds. Older people's hearing changes so they do not hear voices as well (and they are becoming a bigger section of the population) and I think research will show that most younger people do not understand or remember what is said as well either when there is background noise. Our national public radio broadcaster increasingly spends scarce resources on backgrounding talk and even announcements with inappropriate noises and music, including drumming that clatters, clashes, batters or thumps. As typical examples, a program on Quakers, those silence-lovers, was messed up with church organ music, and a serious retrospective on the appalling dangers of the Cold War, was treated like a musical entertainment by, presumably, the sound engineers. Now the News has taken to backgrounding translated speech with voices in the original language. Reportedly a director of radio thinks that talks are batshit anyway, and need jazzing up. Complaints are batted off, although it is admitted that I am not the only complainer. Perhaps the Aunties need to amuse themselves. Many professions can become self-serving.
- The elderly can be grumpy, can't they! Many feel the cold more. Fashions do not aid because it is next to impossible to buy warm clothing and warm underclothing any more, thus adding to global warming, because space heating substitutes for warm clothes.
- Consider a form of 'social tax rebate' , for example an 'Adopt a Granny' scheme which refunds a tax concession for those who want to do good within their community. The concept is the ability for people to 'claim' a social service at a nominal rate as a rebate, as long as it is provided through an organisation.